

Mostlikely Unknown Books

by **Peter Brown**

When Suzanne Ross left her memo about reviewing books no one had read in my mailbox, I said "No way." I couldn't think of anything I'd read that someone else hadn't. I thought of *Famous Long Ago (My Life and Times in the Liberation News Service)* by Raymond Mungo. I read it when I was crashing some apartment on the edge of Harlem with a bunch of Columbia students, (one of whom is now a Philadelphia real estate magnate) and assorted drop-outs. It was a six-floor walk-up with a Puerto Rican super (actually the super's son) named Carlos who sniffed glue and had a habit of showing up after midnight and contributing outrageous sayings which were added to the mescaline inspired scrawlings that took up an entire wall. Mungo was one of the founders of LNS which provided the then-alternative papers with news items and interviews. But the book gets to the heart of the cultural and political upheaval of the '60s like no other and is easily more moving though maybe not as funny as those by would-be revolutionaries Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin. Mungo writes like he's talking to you over a beer in an all-night conversation, working in his French Canadian family, FBI. surveillance, how he was always happy to take time out to check out a movie and wanted to be a good hamburger-eating American and hippie revolutionary at the same time without rhetoric or moralizing. I was going to write about that, but I remembered Robert Redbird once said in an interview that Ray Mungo was his favorite writer, which was the only thing I ever respected him for.

Then I thought about the weird books on Dylan by Stephen Pickering, *A Commemoration, Praxis: One (Existence, Men and Realities)* and *Bob Dylan Approximately* which do their best to link Dylan's lyrics to Jewish mysticism, while sneaking in articles on Buckminster Fuller and dinosaurs. But they've been mentioned in lunatic fringe Dylan magazines, so I know other people have read them.

Then I remembered *The Fan Man* by William Kotzwinkle (occasionally available from E.P. Dutton), a classic insane 20th Century novel about a lunatic grungeball named Horse Badorties who spends all night making strange deals in phone booths, lives in an apartment where everything is buried under something else, hates Puerto Rican music, goes around trying to entice 15-year-old chicks to sing in his love choir and is always advocating the use of hand-held, plastic Japanese battery-powered fans to anyone who will listening while wearing an overcoat in summertime. Kotzwinkle perfectly captures the Lower East Side of the late '60s, reminding me of when I lived at First and First (the armpit of the world) where the bums would have campfires in the sliver of a park across the street, and you'd hear the super's rooster crowing in the morning as you crossed Houson to Yonah Schimmel's knishes. There were some mid-western magician refugee who worked for the Catholic Worker named Whit who lived on the floor below me who shared his pad with an old black dude named Willie. One time Willie knocked on my friend Nick's apartment across the hall, and said he was the cops and Nick almost flushed an ounce of pot down the toilet. When we needed money, Whit and I would go to Eight Street, he'd do magic tricks and I'd play guitar. *The Fan Man* reminded me of all that, but Jim Pierson said it was a favorite at the exclusive school he went to in Connecticut so I can't write about that either.

